

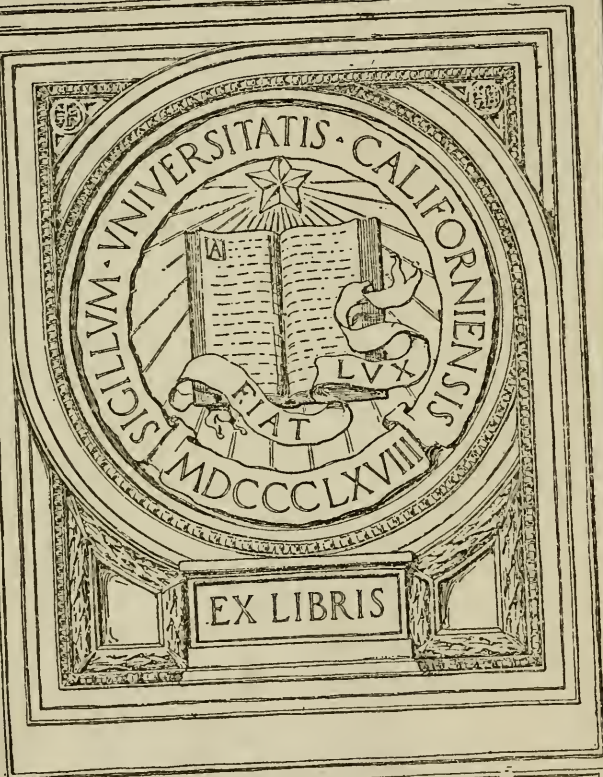
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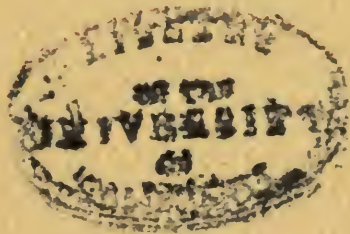
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263
P. 16
1921

Miscellaneous Sonnets



MISCELLANEOUS SONNETS

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF

PLATEN

BY

REGINALD B. COOKE, PH.D.

U.C. '09

ANDRUS & CHURCH
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1921

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Foreword

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MAIN

This, the fourth series of my translations from Platen, contains all the sonnets which may be described as miscellaneous. The *Aurora*, the earliest of his sonnets, was written when Platen was only sixteen, while with the *Epitaph* he finally lay down his pen as sonneteer at the age of thirty-three, with a reputation, so far as concerns this form of verse, second to none in any age or any literature.

Of the four sonnets taken from the *Jugenddramen*, the first is spoken by Prince Astolf in the fourth act of *Der gläserne Pantoffel*, and the other three may be found in *Der Schatz des Rhampsinit*.

The mottoes are, of course, Platen's own, first appearing with the sonnets in 1834 and 1828, respectively.

No English translation of these sonnets has hitherto appeared, with the exception of the nineteenth, a rendering of which by C. H. Genung may be found in Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature*.

The rhyme-schemes of these sonnets are again identical with those of the originals, and the division of each sonnet into four parts is, with two or three exceptions, scrupulously, if sometimes reluctantly, adhered to.

Orr's Island, Maine.

R. B. C.

452891

MISCELLANEOUS SONNETS

MOTTOES

I

What by its own confession
Hath ever youth unfeigned
Is, in restrained expression,
A spirit unrestrained.

II

If you feel quite unprovided,
Having naught to take or lend,
Be the last fragment divided
With your sole-belovéd friend.

AURORA

SHE comes the gray of orient to imbue
With radiant tints; her light seems to appall
The stars, and from the spokes of Charles' Wain fall
Pearls which dissolve upon Earth's lap in dew.
The darkened skies assume an azure hue;
The birds break the long silence with their call,
Each bough voicing Aurora's praise; and all
The winds their soft and balmy breath renew.

She kisses the tree-tops with rosy light,
And what is left unfinished by the night
She stamps, as now completed, with a seal.
The most abundant blessings still reveal
Her path; and though she vanish soon away
She leaves her brother here to cheer the day.

(1812)

LOVE'S FAREWELL

THY presence have I lost for evermore,
My gentle love, with all thy merriment
And all thy charms with silent sorrows blent,
Whom once I chose all other loves before.
I trusted everything her lips then swore
So graciously to me, while Heaven lent
Love's candle-light; yet soon she faithless sent
Me forth deceived, and mocked the love I bore.

Thou dost behold me, my beloved, recline
Before thine altar on this marble stair.
Can naught recall again thy form divine?
Can naught recall thy lineaments so fair,
Which wove perforce a new life about mine,
And now entangle others in their snare?

(1813 or 1814)

UNCERTAINTY

BY swift illusions all too long dismayed,
To inclination yielding thoughtlessly,
Glad when thy friendly glances smiled on me,
Mine sought but thee where throngs their revels made.
And yet, when now my feelings have been weighed,
I must regard thee in perplexity;
I love, but may I also reverence thee ?
Or, 'neath thy guidance, have my footsteps strayed ?

How so ? Or does thine outward form deceive ?
And can the fairest features e'er impart
A beauty which the soul does not achieve ?
Grant thy disdain distresses not my heart,
And when in love our spirits interweave,
Thus speak: "Oh come, for thou my chosen art."

(1816)

IV

DENSE foliage already spans the crest
Of verdant palaces, and clear and bright
The waves portray the heavens and the flight
Of birds returning to their summer nest.
The very flowers, rising from the breast
Of Earth, where droop the darlings of the night,
Smile on thy birthday, by the radiant light
Allured to brave the breezes of the west.

Sweet perfumes truly but no words dispense
Th' untutored flowers in saluting thee,
And to their sisters wise for these they pray —
Their sisters who, less charming to the sense,
More constant sprout, and so perpetually
To-morrow bloom as they bloomed yesterday.

(1819)

V

FROM all these chains oh set thy spirit free,
 Which in the past so bravely thou didst bear,
 And be thou not in puerile despair
 Content with servile mediocrity.
 Though malice clench her fists, yet shall there be
 Living and breathing hearts which boldly dare
 To beat as quick as thine; so let the air
 Resound with none but blithesome melody.

Begrudge the paltry critics not their say,
 Seeking in turn to praise and to deride,
 To inconsistency of soul a prey.
 Slowly their brief resentment will subside;
 But you shake off the coarseness of the day
 Whenever godly rhythms upward guide.

(1820?)

VI

IMPERIOUS in his ardor, one who bore
Full willingly Love's bonds has idolized
In sonnet-songs his Laura, dearly prized
Both in her life and after life was o'er.
And of adventurous deeds in goodly store
Sonnets of melting music once devised
A hero, who o'er th' angry waves emprised
A passage, song his only guiding oar.

And as the third a German next appears,
To join the Florentine and Portuguese,
And sings full armed for doughty cavaliers.
These, who have proved their great abilities,
I follow as a reaper one who shears,
For I dare count myself no fourth with these.

(1820)

THE ROMANTIC DRAMA

SHAKESPEARE, I see thy sprites in many a rôle,
See Puck and Ariel on mischief bent.
A fertile glance into life's depths has lent
To thee, O Calderon, guidance to thy goal.
Thou, Gozzi, ever whimsical and droll,
Hast given us the art of merriment;
And thou, O Tieck, guidest with kind intent
To ever youthful sport the earnest soul.

You never sink to unimpassioned prose.
With endless prodigality you strew
Bright sparks midst which your golden flame still glows.
A great and holy mission yours; with you
Poesy's intoxicating stream arose;
And now the splendors of success accrue.

(1821)

MY VOCATION

ON every shore the haughty billows surge,
Which, by a poet's impetuosity
To pour from out my very veins set free,
At first but streams, now to a sea converge.
That so its little song no longer scourge,
Let the swift waves engulf false repartee;
And with a soft voluptuous melody
Faith's threshold shall the flowery foam submerge.

Do not the waves of ocean, which refresh
The realms of nature, all that lives conceive ?
Has not Urania even sprung from them ?
Oh, might I only likewise pearls enmesh
From depths still inexhaustible, and weave
From them Germania's godly diadem !

(1821)

FROM THE JUGENDDRAMEN—I

BY the green net these lofty boughs afford
As I, thine image in my heart, have lain
O'erarched, how fair the forest seems again,
How sweet to whisper soft complaints abroad.
Solitude brings to me delights restored
Which I have sought these bygone days in vain.
'Tis he who feels not love's tormenting pain
Who lives all heedless midst the human horde.

Weary am I of hastening to and fro,
For truly are such gentle dreams as these
Dearer than traffic with the crowd; but Oh,
Rather than stray with thoughts of thee at ease
In shady groves, might I the fortune know
Here to recline with thee beneath the trees.

(1823)

FROM THE JUGENDDRAMEN—2

O'ER worldly goods how fretfully we spend
Our days, and yet the truest joys unsought
Befall, even as I, though seeking naught,
Found the fresh beauty youth to thee doth lend.
And now be Fate our love's protecting friend,
Whether she lead thy swift-pursuing thought
In many a wayward-wandering path distraught,
Or with a kindly grace thy steps attend.

For oft it happens that a wish at birth
Will banish even the most anxious care,
And oft that it bestows a moment's worth;
Perchance that we desire to alter ne'er
A word; that of the fairest joys on earth
The fairest portion soon shall be our share.

(1824)

FROM THE JUGENDDRAMEN—3

AND so farewell, ye gloomy prison walls,
Ye who have been a prince's residence !
No more I pass the irksome hours hence
Reading my Seneca crouched in these stalls.
You were designed only for knaves and thralls,
Birches and stocks their proper recompense.
You saw them here their savage lives dispense,
And echoed back their vulgar gutter-calls.

You are transformed into a Paradize
Or Blessed Isles, since I with master-hand
Have scrawled upon thee. With enraptured eyes
The future world staring at thee shall stand,
For every place my Muse whimpers and sighs
Save only this lies in the sluggard's land.

(1824)

FROM THE JUGENDDRAMEN—4

FATE rushes fiercely on me, and appears
To me like a wild boar whetting his fangs;
And every minute passes big with pangs,
Each second pregnant with some outrage nears.
Of thievish trade I have suspicious fears,
And even she I love most dearly hangs
Me in a pillory, where my heart gangs
Round like a mill-wheel undershot by tears.

Yet gladly for her fault I suffer all,
As through no fault of mine I do the task
Set by the lovely Author of the Fall.
She strews me where the alligators bask,
She strikes at me as at a volley-ball,
She mashes me to butter in a cask!

(1824)

XIII

TO gain himself a coronal who should
Bestir himself, when, like a venal jade,
For each flat brow our times zealously brade
A wreath from blooms which have no hardihood ?
Who should still emulate the greatest good,
When he who has the emptiest brain is made
Most welcome, who ascend the starry glade
Of heaven, when sparks arise from rotten wood ?

Rubbish in rhymes that all may understand
Goes forth in peace for all to eulogize,
And ranks you as if I were not at hand !
Alas ! no newspapers memorialize
In bronze ; and though proclaimed in every land,
Yet one thing still you lack — praise from the wise.

(1826)

XIV

I DARED to strike an unaccustomed tone,
Devoting all my heart to magnify
The arts through all my life; and when I die,
So shall I die for beauty's sake alone.
Truly I wish that mankind should enthrone
The Better, but should let me, nurtured nigh
The Highest, learn to seek all that is high,
Yea, that my native land her son disown !

Since to her cause my strength I still devote,
I love her not the less, though satisfied
Of all her children to be most remote.
Though I be long departed, yet abide
My gifts, to swell her treasure and denote
A sure possession of our German pride.

(1826)

XV

W^HATE'RE in me critics may criticize,
The courage of my soul I ne'er shall tame,
For if we shun even a moment's fame,
Who then are we to battle with the skies ?
Shall I conceal my true capacities,
And shall I hesitate even to name
My feelings? My own thoughts put me to shame,
Fearing, like swallows, from the earth to rise.

For here 'tis futile to be timorous;
Boldly to speak the truth becometh each
Who soon shall rest in his sarcophagus.
In after times men will my soul beseech
In Paradise, and justify me thus:
In thought so great, how were he mean in speech ?

(1826)

XVI

THIS land of toil I leave without a sigh;
From harsh subjection there is no release
Where man, oppressed by troubles, knows no peace,
Though destined to oblivion by and by.
We have indeed advantages. Here lie
Before us honor, wealth, and the increase
Of knowledge; and we Germans never cease
To wear ourselves out, so, worn out, to die.

And such a man should never know defeat,
But let him thrive where power and luck are wed,
Fawning on each new vogue as seems discreet.
For me, merely a wandering bard, instead
A friend, a bowl of wine, a cool retreat
Suffice, and honor after I am dead.

(1826)

XVII

WHOEVER thought life to anticipate
But lost the half of it in dreams, distraught
With pangs of love, in speech with fools, or fraught
With fever, or in some such hapless state ?
Yea, even he, calm and deliberate,
Who, born with consciousness of what he ought,
From early youth a single path has sought
Through life, must pale before the blows of fate.

Each hopes Fortune may smile in his behoof,
But to bear fortune when it does arrive
Were of the agency of God a proof.
Nor comes it merely since we wish and strive;
It falls not on the sleeper from the roof,
Nor shall the huntsman run it down alive.

(1826)

XVIII

AMID these glittering snow-peaks I am fain
In peace to ponder past adversities.
Scarce back to Germany I turn my eyes,
Yet scarcely forward t'ward th' Italian plain.
Crowns I have dreamed of I pursue in vain,
Which might refresh my burning brow, and sighs,
But seldom stifled, in my breast arise,
As though mere sighs could soothe my spirit's pain !

Where is the heart that sorrows do not rend ?
The plantasms of life forever stole
Upon one, though he fled to the world's end.
One solace yet remains, that with the whole
Of these my burdens I may still contend
Perchance, through strength and dignity of soul.

(1826)

XIX

FURTHER and ever further yet to toil
T'ward distant lands my spirit still doth yearn;
Though Paradise surround where're I turn,
Ne'er could I long cling to my native soil.
While inner conflicts still her peace embroil,
In this short life my soul has come to learn
How easy 't is th' ancestral home to spurn,
To find a new — what difficulties foil!

Yet if one loathes whole-hearted what is base,
It will pursue him from his heritage,
If there 't is honored by the populace.
To flee one's fatherland is far more sage
Than still to bear among a childish race
The yoke of the unthinking rabble's rage.

(1826)

XX

WHAT have you by your Rhine and Ister here
That may enthrone you with the ancient Greek ?
The newspaper, the journal, the critique,
Ministers of police — tobacco — beer !
You who have never known those sisters dear,
Freedom and Art, who, girdled, there would seek
To place upon their heads crowns which bespeak
Perfection — would you pedants Greeks appear ?

Nay, all your efforts are but mockeries,
For Greece knew how to spread th' eternal sheen
Of beauty over everything. What is
The art of which your boasts have ever been ?
In a great ocean of absurdities
A few ingenious swimmers may be seen !

(1826)

XXI

O YOU whose malice stirs afresh the plaster,
That folly and bad taste may be cemented,
With the canaille's good will alone contented,
Who grow yet bold and bolder fast and faster.
When once these lying spirits bring disaster,
All bounds of moderation circumvented,
Then you will call on me, too late repented,
Then you will nominate me your good master:

"Oh would that all his words might be repeated,
Who strove to us the pathway to betoken
To truth, though now his spirit has retreated.
Ne'er by his steps shall Alpine snows be broken
Again; his work among us is completed!"
Yea, all my vengeance this, that naught be spoken!

(1829)

EPITAPH

I WAS a poet born but blows to earn
Of the ill times in which my lot was cast;
But drank of fame ere yet my youth was past,
And left my impress on the speech in turn.
Ne'er in the school of art slothful to learn,
It therefore fell to me new paths to blast,
And to pour forth my soul in rhymes, to last
To distant times, if rightly I discern.

I fashioned songs from various themes, as well
As comedies and legends of the brave,
All in a style which no one could excel.
The second prize for odes to me they gave,
Life's hopes and sorrowings my sonnets tell,
And I have sung these verses for my grave.

(1829)

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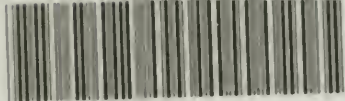
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